Interview Summary: the Honourable Filomena Tassi, Minister of Public Service and Procurement Canada

This witness summary should be read in conjunction with: Public Services and Procurement Canada ("**PSPC**")'s Institutional Report; and the witness summary for the PSPC panel, which consisted of Paul Thompson (Deputy Minister), Catherine Poulin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Departmental Oversight), and Lorenzo Leraci (Assistant Deputy Minister, Procurement).

Minister Tassi was interviewed by Shantona Chaudhury, Yves Côté, Gordon Cameron, and Alexandra Heine on September 5, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Mr. Cameron.

Text contained in [square brackets] are explanatory notes provided by Commission Counsel to assist the reader.

Background

The Honourable Filomena Tassi was the Minister of PSPC from October 26, 2021, until August 31, 2022. She held that role during the Freedom Convoy ("**Convoy**"). On August 31, she became the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Minister Tassi's Involvement in the Federal Response to the Convoy

Minister Tassi stated that her involvement in the Federal Government's response to the Convoy was minimal. She was not part of either the meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Safety, Security and Emergencies ("**SSE**") or the meetings of the Incident Response Group ("**IRG**"). [The SSE's mandate is to consider threats and risks to the safety and security of Canada and Canadians. It manages ongoing emergencies by ensuring an integrated response at the Ministerial level. Meetings of the SSE were convened on February 3, 6 and 8, 2022. The IRG serves as the forum for the Prime Minister and federal Ministers to provide and receive operational updates, deliberate, and make decisions under an accelerated Cabinet process. Meetings of the IRG occurred on February 10, 12, 13, 16, and every day thereafter until February 23.]

Minister Tassi also explained that her involvement in PSPC's internal decision making and coordination with stakeholders and other departments or agencies was minimal. She delegated her authority to Deputy Minister Thompson, who made decisions with respect to procurement and service requests. He was also in charge of communicating and liaising with the agencies that PSPC works closely with, such as the National Capital Commission ("**NCC**"), the Department of Veteran Affairs, and the Department of National Defence ("**DND**").

Deputy Minister Thompson regularly briefed Minister Tassi on those decisions and communications throughout the Convoy. She did not intervene because she had confidence in him. The briefings were oral, not by written correspondence.

PSPC's Role in the Convoy

Minister Tassi explained that PSPC's role during the Convoy was to respond to procurement and service requests from stakeholders, such as the Ottawa Police Service ("**OPS**") and the City of Ottawa, and from other federal departments and agencies, such as the Parliamentary Protective Service ("**PPS**"). The requests that PSPC received during the Convoy were primarily about jersey barriers and fences, and erecting those barriers and fences on or around the federal assets that PSPC is in charge of, such as the War Memorial.

Minister Tassi clarified that although PSPC is in charge of certain federal assets, its role is limited to the protection and maintenance of those assets. Its role is not to make decisions about the safety or security of individuals on or near those assets, or enforcement. That responsibility lies with the OPS, PPS, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who have jurisdiction.

Minister Tassi noted that certain assets that the PSPC is in charge of are located on property where there are overlapping jurisdictions. [For example, the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument, which PSPC is in charge of, is in Confederation Park, which falls within the jurisdiction of the NCC.] In such instances, PSPC has to be sensitive to the different jurisdictions and work with the appropriate authorities. Although Deputy Minister Thompson was the one directly involved in liaising with the appropriate authorities during the Convoy, to Minister Tassi's knowledge, communications with the NCC and other stakeholders (such as DND and the Department of Veteran Affairs) worked well—there was a spirit that everyone wanted to work together to preserve assets and protect the safety of people.

Minister Tassi had minimal knowledge about whether PSPC received procurement requests during the Convoy for tow trucks. She recalled that PSPC was involved in discussions about whether it had equipment that could assist with towing the trucks that were parked on Wellington Street. She said that PSPC's equipment had limited capabilities to assist in the circumstances. Minister Tassi also received information from Deputy Minister Thompson that they were preparing for the potential difficulties in getting tow truck drivers to actually tow the trucks away.